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C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 000928

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SUBJECT: PARTIES TERM DAY ONE OF GENERAL STRIKE "TOTAL
SUCCESS"

REF: A. KATHMANDU 895
 [1](#)B. KATHAMNDU 908

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) On April 7, the second day of the Parties' announced April 6-9 nationwide general strike, demonstrations and arrests continued in parts of the Kathmandu Valley. Normal life in Kathmandu remained largely quiet, however, as virtually all shops remained closed and few private vehicles were seen on the streets. The Parties termed the first day of their strike a "success" despite mass government arrests of over 500 people throughout the country. The government released many demonstrators within a few hours. The Parties planned a mass demonstration in Kathmandu on April 8. The Maoists, who had declared a Kathmandu Valley-only cease-fire and announced they would not infiltrate Party demonstrations and turn them violent (ref A), attacked Sarlahi District Headquarters (eastern Nepal) late on April 5, killing six police, abducting the Chief District Officer, and releasing 107 prisoners from jail, including 22 Maoists. While responding to the attack, a Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) helicopter crashed, killing all ten soldiers aboard. End Summary.

General Strike Shuts Down Country

[1](#)2. (U) Normal life was brought to a standstill nationwide on April 6 and April 7, as schools and businesses remained closed on the first and second days of the seven-party alliance's April 6-9 general strike called to pressure the King to restore democracy. Emboffs observed few vehicles, other than ambulances, cars with diplomatic plates, and those carrying security forces, plying the roads in Kathmandu the afternoon of April 7. Police and protesters clashed in various places in Kathmandu, as party members and student activists protested despite the government's ban on gatherings inside the ring road (ref A). While most rallies throughout the country remained peaceful, protesters burned at least eight vehicles in Kathmandu on April 6, and students threw bricks at the police, causing police to retaliate with

tear-gas and baton charges. Police arrested some students in Kathmandu for burning effigies of the King. On the morning of April 7, there were reports of skirmishes between demonstrators and security forces in several areas of Kathmandu. Police stopped and turned back over 100 Kathmandu-bound buses over fear of possible Maoist infiltration, while Party leaders claimed the buses were stopped to deter their peaceful protest programs.

"A Total Success"

¶13. (U) Seven-party alliance leaders termed day one of their nationwide April 6-9 action "a total success." Nepali Congress spokesperson Krishna Prasad Sitala commented that, "significant numbers of people have participated in the first day of our general strike." K.P. Oli, Central Committee Member, United Marxist-Leninist (UML), noted, "today's demonstrations have shown that people are ready to agitate against autocracy." He criticized the government's crackdown on political activists, explaining that "it shows the government's defeatist mentality."

Government Arrests Over 500,
Many Subsequently Released

¶14. (C) Government security forces have arrested large numbers of individuals over the first two days of the Parties nationwide strike. According to the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), over 200 demonstrating Party activists and students were arrested in the morning hours of April 7. The Kathmandu Post headlined "over 450 arrested in Valley, 250 held in districts" during protests on the first day of the seven-party alliance's nationwide strike on April 6. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed to Emboff that, while the government released many demonstrators within hours of their arrest, as of 1800 local time on April 6, the government was detaining 206 people in 14 different locations in Kathmandu, and dozens of others around the country. OHCHR reported that, of the 111 people arrested in Kathmandu on April 5, only 44 remained in detention, at least 39 of whom had detention orders under the Public Security Act (ref A). Police hit a UML party member in the chest while arresting him at a demonstration in Janakpur in the eastern terai on April 5; on April 6 the man died of a stroke. Human rights groups, including OHCHR, were investigating the incident and the possible role of police action in his death.

Parties Plan April 8 Mass Rally In Kathmandu

¶15. (C) Despite the ongoing arrests, and the government's ban on demonstrations inside the ring road, Oli told Emboff that the seven-party alliance, joined by labor unions, teachers and civil society activists, planned to conduct their April 8 scheduled mass meeting in central Kathmandu's Durbar Square. Oli explained that the general strike, with Party protest programs, would continue through April 9. Gopal Man Shrestha, Nepali Congress-Democratic (NC-D) Acting General Secretary, told Emboff that he was "pleased" with the USG's

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April 5 statement encouraging freedom of assembly. He explained that NC-D cadre planned to participate in the April 8 mass meeting, which he expected to be well attended.

Maoist Attack District Headquarters

¶16. (U) Late on April 5, Maoists armed with bombs and bullets stormed Sarlahi District Headquarters in the eastern terai, killing at least six policemen and destroying a number of government buildings. After freeing all 107 inmates in the jail, 22 of whom were believed to be Maoists, the Maoists abducted the Chief District Officer (CDO), nine policemen,

and the head jailer. Maoists also attacked security installations 25 kilometers north of Malangawa, killing two civilians in the crossfire. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) appealed to the Maoists to release the abducted, noting that the CDO suffered from diabetes and hypertension and needed to take medicine. Minister of State for Information and Communications Shrish Shumsher Rana, issued a statement on April 6 terming the Maoist attack in Malangawa "a minor incident." "It is just a move of the terrorists to show their existence," Rana told the press.

RNA Helicopter Crashes, Killing All Onboard

¶ 17. (C) In the early hours of April 6, an RNA MI-17 helicopter sent by the RNA to support government forces in Malangawa crashed 2 kilometers west of Malangawa, killing all 10 RNA personnel on board. While Maoist leader Prachanda issued a statement taking credit, and calling it the Maoists' first triumph against the "enemy's aerial attacks," the Defense Ministry refuted the claim, explaining that "the lower part of the chopper is made of armored plate and none of the weapons possessed by the terrorists have the capacity to pierce it and cause damage to the chopper." A RNA source told Emboff that an investigation was ongoing, but it was possible that an RNA mortar onboard caused the explosion (septel).

Parties Condemn Maoist Attack

¶ 18. (C) Oli told Emboff that the April 6 Maoist attack on Malangawa was "unfortunate while parties are having peaceful protest programs." "We condemn, and protest the violent activities carried out by the Maoists," Oli stated. Oli also condemned the government's reaction to the Malangawa incident, terming Rana's "minor incident" comment "insensitive" and "out of touch." Similarly, Shrestha

condemned the Maoist attack as "not the right thing to do" when Parties were carrying out peaceful protests. He noted that the Parties continued to urge the Maoists to stop violent activities, and told Emboff that, following the end of the general strike, the Parties would renew their request that the Maoists announce a nationwide cease-fire. Reacting to Rana's statement on Malangawa, Shrestha opined that, while the government had denied Maoist claims that they shot down the helicopter, as no one could believe the government, many Nepalis would believe the Maoists.

Comment

¶ 19. (C) On April 6 and 7, Kathmandu and other towns in the Valley generally were eerily quiet, with the great majority of shops shuttered and cars, buses, and taxis absent from the streets. Many people appeared to have simply stayed home. The Parties could derive satisfaction from the near-universal compliance with the strike, if not for the obvious determination of the Maoists to stick to the path of violence. We expect available Party workers and students in Kathmandu to participate in the mass rally planned for on April 8, and that further clashes with security forces and arrests will occur.

MORIARTY